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ABSTRACT

This paper considers how multilingualism is approached in both Japan and the United States by considering the position and roles of the government, schools, and public. There exists the perception in countries where monolingualism is considered the norm that bilingualism, and certainly multilingualism, are problematic. Multilingualism in a monolingual country is frequently seen as a threat to the established monolingual and monocultural way of life. While Japan and the United States are typical of monolinguistically-dominated societies, and some similar attitudes prevail in both countries, their approaches to dealing with multilingualism are vastly different. In Japan and the United States, there are prevailing attitudes that for speakers of the dominant languages--Japanese and English respectively--there is no need to learn another language, and that all others living in the countries should learn to speak the primary language. Yet both countries are far more linguistically diverse than the typical lay person or government official in either country realizes. This is a more recent phenomenon in Japan, but in America, significant multilingualism goes back to the founding of the first colonies. Multilingualism has been unavoidable in a country comprised of immigrants from across the world. It is concluded that in both countries multilingualism is not a threat, but that narrow-mindedness and the failure to look beyond ones own borders are far greater problems. (Contains 17 references.) (KFT)

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Approaching Multilingualism in Japan and the United States

Shawn M. Clankie

There exists a perception in many places where monolingualism is considered the norm that bilingualism, and certainly multilingualism, are problematic. Some of these perceptions are based on fact (e.g. that economic concerns are a considerable factor in multilingualism), yet others are groundless (e.g. the idea that children will become confused if learning two or more languages). Similarly, multilingualism in a monolinguistic community is frequently seen as a threat to the monolingual, and frequently monocultural, way of life. Japan and the United States are typical of monolinguistically-dominated societies[1]. Yet, while some of the attitudes towards multilingualism in Japan and the U.S. are indeed similar, the approaches in dealing with multilingualism are vastly different. This paper considers how multilingualism is approached in both countries by considering the position of the government, schools, and the public.

It is important first to come to some definition of multilingualism as it will be used for the purposes of this paper. By multilingualism I am not simply referring to the ability of a speaker to speak more than one language (individual

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1 This is not to say that the U.S. is not a multilingual country. Simply, those who hold the majority of power in the United States are monolingual speakers of English. This is what is meant by *monolinguistically-dominated*.

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multilingualism), although that in itself is subsumed in the broader definition that follows. Multilingualism for our purposes here will mean *societal multilingualism* (Romaine, 1994:34) within a linguistic community (either indigenous or transplanted, thriving or endangered) where more than one language is in use on a regular basis by members of that community or through contact with other communities.

Perceptions of Language Learning

On the surface it may appear that Japan has embraced bilingualism. Students are given six years of compulsory English courses in junior and senior high school and there are proposals to extend that to the elementary schools as well (thusfar it is on a solely voluntary basis). A recent advisory panel to former Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi has even recommended the dramatic step of making English the second official language of Japan (Nakatsu, 2000). Similarly, there is no shortage of language 'schools' to cater to those desiring extra practice in English or another foreign language. However, surface appearances such as those represented above are just that. A visitor just arriving in Japan might be persuaded to believe that Japan is a paradise for language learners, and therefore that some form of bilingualism (through second language learning or through Japanese returnees who spent time abroad) is tacitly accepted. However, it is appropriate to probe beyond the appearances to the attitudes toward foreign or additional language use. While it is indeed true that Japanese students are given six years of compulsory English, the time spent actually learning English amounts to little beyond a few hours a week, taught rarely through a

communicative approach, and is hampered in many cases by teachers who themselves are, or consider themselves to be, weak in the language they are teaching. There is also a stigma prevalent in Japan towards being an articulate speaker of a second language. This is evident in the case of children returning from overseas who have increased competency in the foreign language as being ostracized, bullied, or forced to hide their fluency for the sake of fitting in.

The Ministry of Education for its part holds a hypocritical position. It has been involved with such concepts as Kokusaika ('internationalization') in the schools and society, yet we rarely hear the term anymore. It is also responsible for the suggestion of a move to elementary school English and has involved itself with implementation of the JET Program. Yet, at the same time this most conservative of Ministries has sent mixed signals. It recently stressed the importance of the mastery of Japanese by elementary school students first before studying a second language thereby suggesting that both can't be learned simultaneously (Panel warns against early English study, 2000). Similarly, it has refused to address more serious concerns stifling the adequate learning of foreign languages; namely, the learning of English (and other subjects) only as a means of passing the university entrance exams rather than as a tool for learning and understanding beyond Japan's own borders.

In public, the reluctance by many to use a foreign language in occasions where appropriate (e.g. assisting visitors to this country) contributes further to misguided and antiquated perceptions that Japanese aren't good foreign language learners and hence inhibits widespread bi/multilingualism.

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Finally, there is an undeniable view by some in the community that this is Japan, we speak Japanese. Why do we need to learn a foreign language?

Turning now to the U.S., a country notorious for it's monolingualism amongst at least the Caucasian sector of its population, the views towards multilingualism are different, but often result in the similar effect of monolingualism. The predominant view by those who advocate monolingualism is that we speak English, the world language. As such, there is no need to learn another language. These views are based on a perceived linguistic superiority, and are compounded by the economic and political power of the United States. In schools, if a foreign language is required, students generally enroll in two years of a language in high school, and perhaps another two in college (often repeating the same introductory level courses). The foreign languages of preference are generally Spanish (because of both America's proximity to Mexico and its high immigrant population from Latin America) and French. Very few individuals gain any form of communicative competence from this level of a foreign language.

There is no overriding government body (such as the Ministry of Education) dictating the number of years of foreign language education as rigorously as in Japan. There is the Department of Education but it involves itself far less in curricula issues and more on issues such as budgetary concerns. Rather the traditional assumption has been that college-bound high school students should have two years of foreign language education as a prerequisite for college. When students enter a university, they then generally take two more years of foreign language classes as part of the general education requirements. Generally, the selection of languages at this level is far greater (e.g. at the

University of Hawai'i 25-30 languages are scheduled per semester. (cf. Hokudai which averages 8-10)).

The overriding similarity between the perception of language learning in Japan and that in the United States is "Who needs it?" and contributes to the apprehension and misunderstanding towards foreign languages found in both countries.

Japan and the U.S. as Multilingual Countries

How many languages are there in Japan? How many are there in the United States? The answers to these questions offer a view of the perceptions toward multilingualism harbored in each country. In asking my Japanese students how many languages are spoken in Japan, the answers generally run from 1-3. Those answering 'one' argue that Japanese is the official language of Japan and Japanese is the only language spoken here. The more liberal-oriented of students who answer 'two' or 'three' would suggest Ainu and Okinawan as other languages spoken in Japan. My students are often astounded to learn that there are at least 15 languages in use in Japan. Barbara Grimes (1996: 685ff) in the *Ethnologue* (13th ed.), the primary linguistic resource for language use in a given area, cites the 15 languages listed below.

Ainu	Miyako
Amami-Oshima (Northern)	Central Okinawan
Amami-Oshima (Southern)	Oki-no-Erabu
Japanese	Toku-no-shima

Japanese Sign Language
Kikai
Korean
Kunigami
Yaeyama
Yonaguni
Yoron

Generally, the first question asked after being presented with a list such as this is, How many of these are actual languages and not dialects? In the introduction to the Ethnologue we find the answer.

> To those of us interested in cross-cultural communication and developing usable literature for speakers of many languages, however, it seems clear that one of the main factors that must be considered in distinguishing 'language' from 'dialect' is how well two linguistically close speech communities understand each other. Marginal intelligibility does not allow their speakers to engage in meaningful communication beyond bare essentials (Grimes, 1996, vii).

Thus, mutual intelligibility is the primary criteria used to distinguish languages from dialects. It is worth noting, that the perception among many Japanese has been that these are dialects. Shibatani (1990) notes the following,

> "Japanese dialectologists have generally regarded Ryuukyuan as a group of Japanese dialects since the

> appearance of Tojo's pioneering work on dialect divisions of Japanese (Tojo 1927). Once a genetic relationship is established between two languages, it is a moot point whether to regard them as two languages or as two dialects of one language (191)."

Perhaps Shibatani was attempting to address the on-going debates over dialect versus language, or was simply considering the issue in terms of the relationship of one language to another alone. But, it is precisely because it is seen as a 'moot issue' by many in Japan that these languages are in serious trouble. If they are indeed dialects, then why is there such an attempt to assimilate the Ryuukyuan culture and its 'dialects' into Japanese? There is no danger of the Kagoshima dialect, for example, disappearing despite it being the most divergent of the dialects on the main part of the Japanese archipelago. In terms of language planning, it is views such as these which are most dangerous to attempts to stabilize endangered languages. Applying Grimes criteria would suggest that intelligibility should be a key criterion for differentiating dialect from language (and even Shibatani (191) acknowledges that most of the Ryuukyuan dialects are mutually unintelligible). The skeptical, however, will usually follow up by suggesting that these languages have very few speakers, so Japan is essentially a monolingual society. While, in many cases, it is indeed true that these languages have a small number of speakers that does not mean that the language does not exist, or that it is not in use. There are greater reasons why these minority languages are in trouble and these go directly to the crux of linguistic policy, an area that will be explored in the next section. It is certainly true that the majority of Japan's population speaks Japanese, and as I have

argued the majority are monolingual speakers, yet stopping there without a fuller examination of the other languages in use simply skirts the issue. I would simply argue that Japan is a multilingual society comprised mainly of monolingual speakers.

Let us assume, then, that there are 15 languages which are mother-tongue languages and which may or may not be being transmitted intergenerationally (i.e. from parents to children). The question which now must be asked is, Are there others?

I would like to argue that there are indeed several other languages, many transplanted, which remain in daily use, are transmitted intergenerationally, and therefore add to the multilingual fabric of Japan. First, there must certainly be English. The number of families which have been created by marriage between one Japanese parent and one American, British, Australian, or Canadian lends credence to this point. Many of these children in Japan are brought up bilingually. There is also a significant population working in this country (both expatriate and long-term residents), many of whom will spend their entire lives here. We can also turn to the media for support. The Japan Times has been published under various names in English since 1865 (two years before the official opening to the West). In advertising, it is difficult to pick up a domestic product without some English-based expression on the label[2].

[2] Clankie (1999) differentiates in advertising between English-inspired lexical items and borrowings from English. Both have a rooting in English and therefore have been grouped together for the purposes of English use in this paper.

Similarly, if Japan considers the northern islands off Hokkaido to be its territory, then we must argue that Russian is a language of Japan. It is also certainly in use at Otaru and Wakkanai, two ports frequented by Russian sailors (in the case of Wakkanai many of the directional signs are in both Japanese and Russian).

Certainly, Mandarin Chinese must be considered. There is a long-standing community in Yokohama and many permanent Chinese living throughout Japan. The most recent government estimates are that there are 294,000 Chinese currently living in Japan (Japan Times, 5/31/00).

Brazilian Portuguese, as a result of the repatriation of many Brazilians of ethnic-Japanese descent must also be included. There is a large community in Gunma prefecture and in many of Japan's major cities. Recent government estimates place this group at 224,000 (Japan Times 5/31/00). The same consideration must be given to Spanish, through repatriation from Peru.

In the 1980's a significant number of Iranians came to Japan to work in jobs Japanese saw as undesirable. Many of these workers have married Japanese and contribute to Japanese society. Many have maintained their linguistic heritage through Persian or other Iranian minority languages (let us assume most speak Persian). Their presence is most widely known in Tokyo. Should Persian not be considered a language present and used on a daily basis here?

For a broader discussion of the motivations for such use, see Clankie (1999, Chapter 7).

Finally, Tagalog must be considered. There is a significant Filipino population in Japan. These include workers in entertainment, company employees, and many who have dotted the countryside as brides to Japanese farmers (as have many Chinese women). Many of these people are permanent members of Japanese society. A recent article in the Asahi Evening News points to the 6,000 marriages a year between Japanese and Filipinos, noting that Filipino families average three children to Japan's one and a half (Horwich and Turk, 5/7/00). This suggests that the use of Tagalog in Japan is only likely to increase in the future.

The point of the above explanation is to suggest that Japan is a society that is oriented far more multilinguistically than many people (Japanese and non-Japanese) believe. It will only increase in the future as Japan's population ages, families become smaller, and the need for foreign workers grows. Japan's foreign population already stands (as of 1999) at 1.23 % (Japan Times 6/1/00), equating to well over 1.55 million non-Japanese and this too will continue to grow.[3] This is a 32% increase over the estimate for 1989 (Japan Times 5/31/00). If the current trend continues the number of non-Japanese will top two million by the end of 2007.[4]

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[3] Many people view Japanese as a monolingual society on the basis of percentage of population alone, suggesting that because Japan is over 98% ethnic Japanese, Japan is thus monolingual. Yet, while 1.23% of the population in percentage terms is small, 1.55 million itself is not a small number.

[4] This estimate was calculated by subtracting the current population from 2,000,000 then diving the result by the mean of the most recent 10 year increase (Japan Times, 6/1/00). The result is 8.87 years, or the year 2007.

There may be fear in Japan that the influx of foreigners will somehow destabilize society, and that Japanese will begin to decline. I would like to suggest that these views are based on little actual fact. Those who come to Japan from other countries generally strive for many of the same goals as Japanese; a desire to be part of a community and a desire to contribute to that community. While preserving their own cultural and linguistic heritage, the non-Japanese communities will also seek to contribute through learning Japanese (we can see this happening already). The assumption that most non-Japanese cannot speak Japanese is becoming less and less true, and the goal of bilingualism is the norm among many non-Japanese living in Japan. The fact is that most immigrant communities seek a middle ground, between absolute assimilation and complete pluralism. It is absolute pluralism (which leads to balkanization) and absolute attempts at forced assimilation (leading to repression) which forces groups to lash out at one another.

Turning now to multilingualism in the United States the situation is quite different. Historically, the U.S. has always been multilingual. Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the U.S. had literally hundreds of American Indian tribes, and in most cases, each tribe had a different language. So, in a very real sense, what became the United States has always been multilingual. European settlers who came in successive waves created communities where their native languages flourished for generations. Remnants of these languages persist in the place names for example, (e.g. Eau Claire and Fond du Lac in Wisconsin from French), and in festivals (there are many annual Festa Italianas, French heritage festivals, Cinco de Mayo, and so forth). Many of these communities maintain their linguistic heritage to this day. Chicago has the largest Polish community

outside of Poland. French Creole still exists in Louisiana, and many American Indian (Amerind) languages are still being taught. In all, the Ethnologue (130) cites 213 languages in total; 176 of which are still living languages, 2 which have no mother-tongue speakers left, and 35 which are extinct. Many Americans recognize that English is not the only language in use in America. In fact, English is not even the national language of America. The United States has no official language. This is important because it suggests a nominal level of respect, or at the very least *tolerance*, for the rights of other language communities. Attempts by a minority to make English the official language of the United States have generally failed. As a result of increased ethnic diversification in the future the situation will likely remain unchanged. Whereas the nation has no official national language, the states have the option of declaring official languages. In the case of Hawai'i, for example, English and Hawaiian have official status (although the language of the government remains English). In essence, however, English is the de facto language of the federal and state governments at present.

In the above figures on U.S. multilingualism it is important to note the 35 extinct languages, and the many more which are moribund (on the verge of extinction). This brings us back to language policy.

Language Policy: Assimilation and Pluralism

Generally recognized are two forms of language policy: assimilation and pluralism. Assimilation is based on the principle that all minority languages

should be assimilated into the broader linguistic community (most often a monolinguistic one). The goal is to purge out the minority languages and cultures. The opposite of assimilation is pluralism. Under this form of policy, minority language use is more or less left alone to flourish or die as determined by the speakers of that ethnic group. Where do Japan and the U.S. fit in terms of assimilation and pluralism?

In the case of Japan, it is not difficult to understand that the official language policy is assimilationist. Japan has one national language, Japanese. The long-standing policy has been to assimilate the Ainu and Ryuukyuan indigenous communities into using Japanese. These policies are longstanding, and are guided by Nihonjinron theorists holding the mistaken assumption that Japan is a homogeneous monolingual society where Japanese is the only language[5]. On several occasions the Japanese government has gone so far as to state in 1980 that there are no linguistic minorities present in Japan (Maher, 1997, 116) and in 1986 that Japan is a "mono-ethnic nation" (1996, Brochure on the Ainu People). In the case of Ainu several laws were enacted: including the 1901 Regulation for the Education of Former Aborigines' Children, the 1911 Revised Regulations of Education for Former Native Children both of which set out to destroy the Ainu language and culture. Even recent government memoranda such as a 1993 memoranda on special education policy dealing with the use of Japanese Sign

[5] A detailed and up to date discussion of Nihonjinron can be found in Arnason and Sugimoto (1995).

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Language (JSL) has set out to assimilate JSL use[6]. For the most part, these policies have succeeded. Ainu as a language is in serious trouble, and many of the Ryuukyuan languages have very few native speakers left (most of whom are elderly). Most of the younger speakers from these ethnic groups are now monolingual Japanese speakers. While the government has nearly succeeded, one must ask the real cost of such a decision. Eliminating a language also eliminates important parts of a culture as well as an identity and a history unique in the world. Crystal (1997:44) writes the following:

> To lose a language is to lose a unique insight into the human condition. Each language presents a view of the world that is shared by no other. Each has its own figures of speech, its own narrative style, its own proverbs, its own oral or written literature...Moreover, the loss of a language means a loss of the inherited knowledge that extends over hundreds or thousands of years.

Crystal concludes, "Language loss is knowledge loss, and it is irretrievable."

The course taken by the Japanese government regarding indigenous languages has been direct. Yet, in the case of transplanted languages the government has had far less success. In part, this is because the speakers of these languages are considered foreigners (i.e. not Japanese) meaning that the government has

[6] In the case of JSL (which is markedly different of standard Japanese), the government sought to assimilate JSL to be more of a representation of standard Japanese.

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viewed them as non-permanent fixtures on the Japanese landscape. Linguistically the result has been long-term language maintenance. This is particularly evident in the Korean community where there are Korean schools maintaining the language.[7] Being pushed away by the Japanese, and the reinforcement that they are not Japanese, has only increased the resiliency of the many linguistic communities to maintain their native language use. So in a very real sense, Japan is practicing assimilation amongst those it considers or wants to be Japanese, but inadvertently allowing pluralism in those it see as transient, or not Japanese.

The situation in the United States is quite different. The U.S., in most cases, practices a hands-off approach. But this has not always been the case. Many assimilationist policies have been practiced in the past and it was not until the 1960's that the U.S. truly began to move towards a form of pluralism (see Edwards 1994: 177ff). Many of the Amerind and immigrant languages have become extinct from the past policies of the U.S. Government, and the attempts to mould America in "a melting pot". Yet, there is a continuing process of change as ethnic groups seek greater self-determination in their community affairs. We can file our taxes and get most government information in Spanish, and it is not unusual to be given a choice in telephoning a government office to use English or Spanish. The recent census was printed in 5 additional languages (Spanish, Korean, Tagalog, Chinese and Vietnamese), with language assistance guides similar to the census produced in an additional 50 languages (U.S. Census

[7] It is worth noting that the government refuses to accredit any school where the language of instruction is not Japanese. (Maher, 1997, 116)

Bureau, 2000). The primary area, however, where one can truly say America openly practices assimilation is in the schools. Bilingual education programs have suffered serious attacks in recent years by proponents of English-only curricula. The vast majority of children in America are taught through English-medium classes. Part of the reason for this is diversity and simple economics. There is far too much linguistic diversity to be able to educate every child in his/her mother tongue until they become bilingual. Many school districts have students of 10 or more mother tongues in school together. How can they do justice to each student's linguistic needs? Yet, as Skutnabb-Kangas (1999:7) rightly points out, the failure to provide bilingual education to immigrant children has fueled significant criticism that the U.S. is in violation of individual linguistic human rights, as set out in The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities (1996).

Similarly, there has been a backlash against immigrants who cannot speak English by monolingual English speakers. Misunderstandings about bilingualism continue to spread quickly in the United States. This is evident in the Unz law (fighting bilingual education) and the debates over Ebonics in California, and the debate over the use of Pidgin (Hawaiian Creole English) by both students and teachers in Hawai'i. Despite the problems in language policy and education found throughout the U.S., minority languages are still present and many, through concerted efforts and the continuing influx of immigrants, will persist as long as the speakers of the language see a need for the language.

A Note on the "We live here. We don't need a foreign language" Phenomenon

An assumption made by many residents of both countries is that there is no need to learn another language because we live here. Implicit behind this statement is that (a) we speak the majority language, and (b) that all others should too. It is certainly one's right whether to choose to learn another language, but unfortunately there are devastating consequences that result from the assumptions above. In Japan, it is a failure to look beyond one's own borders. This is evident in areas beyond language use, and resonates in statements such as "Japan was a closed country and an island nation, so we are not prepared to play on an equal footing with others". The failure to look beyond one's confines to what others are doing has resulted in domestic problems far too numerous to list here, and a reluctance to new ideas from outside Japan. A recent editorial in the Asahi Shimbun (6/1/2000, 9) recognized this fact. Citing a speech by Professor Heita Kawakatsu, one can find statements such as "(Japan) is moving toward a new age that gives priority to internal governance", and "we rarely here about Japan's "international contribution"".

In the U.S., rather than insolationism (a problem the U.S. rarely faces) it is an assumption of linguistic superiority, where "We can go anywhere an speak English" is the motto of the tourist. This in itself, leads to a debasement of the value of minority languages. That the use of one language over another is so greatly entwined in every other aspect of life should come as a surprise to no one. Yet, many still insist that monolingualism is best. It is those people who most need to be confronted with what multilingualism really means.

Conclusions

The idea that Japan and the U.S. are monolingual countries is a stereotype based solely on the perceived linguistic abilities of the majority linguistic group in those countries. Both countries are, however, far more linguistically diverse than the lay person or government official in either country will acknowledge. Monolingualism is an aberration. Multilingualism is the norm in most places in the world. Children often grow up in multilingual societies learning the language(s) of their parents, a trade language, one or two national languages, and a world language with little problem. This is the case of India, many African countries, Papua New Guinea and other places throughout the world. Multilingualism is not a threat. Narrowmindedness and a failure to look beyond one's own borders are far greater problems facing monolinguistic cultures.

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